

with a weaker or less tenured supervisor to help balance things out. We then talk about those decisions so everyone is comfortable and understands why we made them. We all just want to be successful and work as part of the team.

When we can, we also want two people on each 9-1-1 call for maybe the first 10-15 seconds. We met with a lot of opposition when we started doing this, but we do it to get two sets of ears on that location. We have 100% mitigated addressing issues by doing this. We have two 9-1-1 professionals plus all the technology available to us to determine that location and ensure it gets entered correctly.

PSC: What kind of discipline issues do you run into, and how do you handle discipline?

TH: You know you are going to run into that at any center, no matter what size you are or what type of center you work in. We just apply things the same across the board. The first time you do something is not when we have an issue. Minor issues are always handled verbally on the floor, if it becomes a repeated issue then it gets escalated. By the time it gets to the deputy director or myself, it's a pattern of behavior. Most items are honest mistakes though and don't ever need to come off the floor for any remediation.

PSC: What advice would you give to other centers who struggle with staffing levels, hiring and retention? Where should they start?

TH: Recognize the most important decision you make will be that initial hire. I would look to other centers for their success and failure as well. Every region has their own idiosyncrasies. We do tend to have lots of turnover in Hampton Roads because we such a heavy military community, and people are always being stationed elsewhere. There's a lot of traffic in and out of the region. Getting new hires trained quickly and efficiently helps as well. Try to model what works instead of using a pre-fit mold the recruit has to go through and fit into. Identify their strengths and use those to help them be successful.

PSC: What would you say are the most important things other centers can do to maintain their staffing levels and be successful?

TH: Give them the tools they need to do their job, recognize them for a job well done and have open communication. Make them part of the process. Do not be afraid to include your frontline employees in your processes.

PSC: Anything else you would like to add?

TH: I've been fortunate to be involved with APCO International and Virginia

APCO. Working with them allowed me to see things in other centers and internationally that really helped me in our center. The value of APCO is the networking. You aren't the only person with the problem you are experiencing, and you don't have to always come up with your own solution. That was a driving force for me during my time serving with APCO.

A fully staffed center may seem like a long way off for many, but Hall demonstrates that having a plan and remembering to value your staff can lead to a solid team. Remember to grow your direct reports, and don't be afraid that they may leave. Instead, be afraid of them being poorly trained and staying. Terry also makes a valid point about APCO. We all experience issues and need to remember we have each other as resources. Reach out to others, join an APCO committee, work group, or standards development committee, use PSConnect. Together, we can solve our national staffing crisis, one center at a time. ●

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